

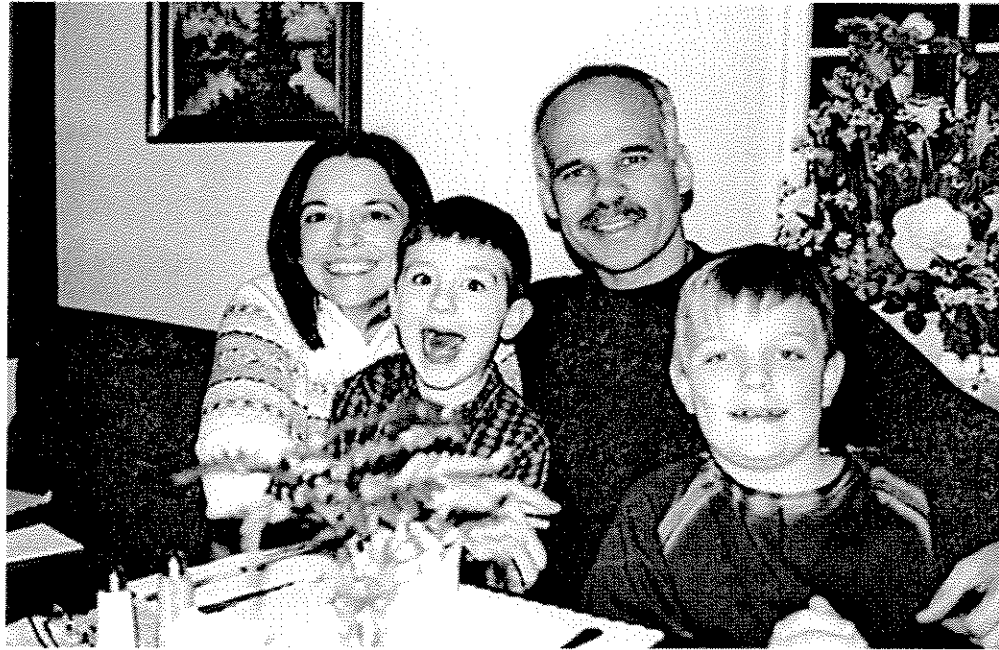
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Sunday, November 6, 2005



Teela family

Kathy and Jim Teela, with sons Joel, 6, and Zachary, 10.

First Person

Now I know adoption isn't second best

Once beyond the paperwork and peering questions, we found joy of parenthood in sons.

By James B. Teela

Having children is something most newlyweds simply take for granted. But the truth is that many couples, young and old, suffer in silence with infertility.

For Kathy and I, grappling with our own infertility was a difficult and painful time in our lives. As the months slowly ticked by, until they quickly became years, it seemed as if everyone around us was getting pregnant and starting their families.

And while we were genuinely happy for our family and friends, I'd be lying if I didn't confess that we both felt just a tinge of envy with each new announcement.

Finally, after countless medical consultations, impersonal intrusions into the most private parts of our bodies and a variety of surgical procedures, we eventually resigned ourselves to the fact that conceiving our own children simply wasn't going to be in the cards. As we began to grieve our loss, we

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both struggled to accept the fact that we would likely never have a little boy with my eyes or a little girl with Kathy's dimple.

As the reality of our situation sank in, Kathy almost immediately began to warm to the idea of adoption. As she gently began to nudge me toward this alternative, I was slow to seriously consider the possibility. I simply had difficulty letting go of the hope that God might yet work a miracle in our lives.

Inside, I felt inadequate as a husband and was reluctant to admit that I would likely never have children of my own.

As God softened my heart, I eventually consented to explore adoption with a healthy dose of skepticism and a less than vigorous dose of enthusiasm. As we completed what seemed to be reams of paperwork and forms, I resented the fact that the various agencies needed to know so much about our personal lives. After all, those who could conceive their own children never had to "prove" they were qualified to be parents.

Within months of our application, we got a call from the agency, letting us know we had been selected for a newborn placement. Shortly after, we soon got the call to inform us that the baby we were so anxiously awaiting was born. But our hearts sank as the agency's director went on to explain that the birth mother had vacillated on her decision, deciding instead to parent the baby herself.

Oh, how our hearts were broken! How desperately we needed hope and assurance. And so God used this time of suffering and trial to build our faith, strengthen our character and draw us nearer to Him. Little did we know that even as we grieved, another precious baby had already been conceived that would be placed in our home yet that year.

And so it was that with great fanfare and anticipation, Zachary arrived in our home just before Christmas. Now, nearly 11 years later, we are the grateful parents of not one, but two beautiful boys.

While Zach doesn't have my eyes, he does have Kathy's dimple and it is actually Joel who got Kathy's eyes! Their joyful presence in our home has permanently painted over all of the deep wounds of our infertility and failed first adoption.

Having the unique perspective of adoptive parent has also helped Kathy and me better comprehend and appreciate the significance of our Christian faith. In fact, New Testament writers often likened God's heavenly grace and mercy in our own lives to that of an earthly adoptive father.

It was the apostle Paul who declared, "In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will."

Contemplating my boys' official adoption decrees, I am reminded that Zach and Joel, for all intents and purposes, are now considered our natural children, and are entitled to the same rights and privileges which they would have been entitled to had they been our natural heirs. The truth is the privilege is all ours!

As Kathy and I reflect on our family and our faith, we have come to realize and appreciate that God did in fact perform a miracle in our lives -- the miracle of adoption. Today, it is simply impossible to imagine anyone other than Zach and Joel in our lives. While I used to think that adoption was a second-best way to start a family, I now realize that it isn't second best at all - only a different way to form a family.

James B. Teela and his wife, Kathy, of Brighton, are the grateful adoptive parents of Zachary (10) and Joel (6). November is National Adoption Month, celebrated throughout the United States in an effort to raise our awareness of the 119,000 children in foster care nationwide waiting for permanent families. You can reach Jim at james.teela@juno.com.

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